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HOW TO TRAP AND THE MARKETING OF YOUR FURS.

Containing the Story of

The Boy Trappers of Beaver Bend

By George J. Theissen

Illustrated by Harrison Cady

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The
Boy Trappers of Beaver Bend
Or
Big Money From Furs

Also secrets which professional pelt hunters use in taking game. How to make baits and scents, capture skunk and civet without odor, pack skins for shipment, when to trap the prime hides, how to mark and care for steel traps, etc., etc.

Edited By GEORGE J. THIESSEN

the well-known authority and writer on the subject of traps and trapping. The reading of this book will bring dollars into the hands of every amateur pelt hunter.

European War Helps American Trappers!

Trapping has long been a favorite pin-money pastime among the boys and young men of America.

Now, through changed conditions wrought by war, the center of the Fur industry has been transferred from overseas to America, and trapping has become an industry of prime importance.

Instead of being a pin-money proposition, it now gives American boys a chance to add materially to their income—to engage in a money-making business.

Before the war, Russia furnished a large proportion of each year's output of furs. Now the Russian source of supply is cut off. A few years ago the big fur auctions were held each year in London—American furs were sent there to be sold. Furs were dyed abroad—and part of them were sent back to America to be sold.

Now the big fur auctions are held in America. St. Louis and New York are battling for supremacy as the leading fur market of the world. Pelts are dyed in America. They are sold in America.

The automobile has played its part in the gigantic transformation. Fur coats by the tens of thousands are now used by automobilists, for spring, fall and winter driving.

The rarer sorts of furs are becoming scarce—are often unattainable. As a result, the skins of common animals—skunks, weasles, raccoons, etc.—are becoming correspondingly valuable. These animals can be found and trapped right around home. Their pelts not only bring the farmer and the farmer boy a quick profit, but they rid the farm, in many cases, of nasty pests which prey upon poultry, and, in a multitude of ways, render themselves obnoxious.

The conditions above outlined have resulted in a demand for furs such as was never known before in any country.

The boys and young men of America can profit by this demand. To help them to do it, COMFORT has prepared this book. It is written by men who know how to trap. If you do not know how it will teach you—and if you do, it will show you how to trap **more successfully**.

We have published this book for your benefit and have given it to you free, or without cost even of postage. We have done this to help you to get your share of the millions that will be paid this year to American trappers; and to do our part toward securing America's permanent hold on the leadership of the fur business of the world.

W. H. GANNETT, Publisher of COMFORT..

The Boy Trappers of Beaver Bend

Getting Started

JACK Wallace and I had decided to trap! A touch of winter was in the air; the dry leaves were heaped in piles and gave forth a rustle when stirred by the wind. Fur was beginning to prime and in the past few weeks my partner and I had explored the small streams in search of dens and signs. With tracks a-plenty there were prospects of a good catch, but since we never had made a set, we were somewhat puzzled as to the best methods to employ.

Jack was a neighbor boy, just sixteen. I was younger. The Wallace farm adjoined ours. On these we were going to test our skill with skunk, mink, raccoon, muskrat and the various fur bearers.

"I got three traps," my companion announced, exhibiting them. "Could you get some?"

"A few," was the reply. "Father found seven in the shed. They are rusty—"

"Let's get some of the rust off so they will work."

With a piece of brick and kerosene we soon had our outfit working as well as could be expected. Two of the traps would not work, but having no money, we had to make the best of things. In fact we felt sure we would get some fur and then later buy what we needed.

About mid-October we made our first sets. They were along a creek at holes in the bank where signs were numerous.

"Huh!" Jack grunted, slipping from the bit of sod upon which he stood and landing almost to his waist in water. "I'll bet that scared everything in Beaver Bend. Further"—and his teeth began to chatter as he climbed on shore—"when I get home—"

A splash sounded nearby and some animal swam up the stream and disappeared in a swirl of mud and scum.

"What's that?" we chorused.

Neither answered. We stood watching. Nothing further took place. Then, without speaking, we started toward home, each dreaming of the money he would make by selling furs.

The next day we were up before the sun. Soon we reached our first set. It had not been disturbed. The next was the same. Our hopes fell. Should we catch nothing at all?

Down the stream we went. Our third trap held something. The animal was tugging at the chain. A blow dispatched it. "Look," Jack yelled, "it's a big rat. What—?" "I know," was the interruption. "That is just like the muskrat father killed last summer in the barnyard. It's valuable, too!"

"You bet," was the reply.

Carrying the fur bearer by the tail we hurried

along. Nothing more rewarded us. Yet we were happy, and with the help of our hired hand, we soon had the skin on a board and hanging in the barn.

Six more pelts were captured that week. We worried, however, over the traps that had been sprung but which had nothing in them. That Sunday, however, Jack came running over with an article he found in a magazine, showing how to take the various animals and market their furs to advantage. "It's just what we need," he said, "for it tells the reason why so many of our traps are empty. In the first place, all muskrat sets ought to be in about three inches of water so as to catch by the hind legs. They are stronger and longer than the front ones. Further, it gives a list of baits for each animal. It says here that for muskrat decoys we ought to use apples, carrots and turnips. You can bet I am glad Aunt Jane subscribes to 'COMFORT' and has the old issues. I will look them all up and then we are bound to have better luck."

"You're right," I agreed. "If we only had these sooner, we would have caught more fur."

We also learned that a bit of white paper or cloth would often draw the muskrat when all other lures failed. This is because the animals are inquisitive.

The days passed. The number of skins increased rapidly.

A couple of weeks after we placed our first traps, we took a large mink. We did not understand why this happened, since all our sets were for muskrat. Later we learned that mink often visit the various dens in search of food and the one we had taken simply blundered into the trap. Not long afterward we caught another also which the local dealer pronounced as "cotton."

"What's cotton?" we asked.

"That," said the buyer, "is a grade of mink with the under hair white or nearly so. If you dip the pelt in water you can more readily see. You will notice," he continued, "that the fur looks almost white and the tips black—a sort of a spotted effect. Other mink show a dark brown, as a rule, when tested as I have explained."

Ice had formed on the creek, not thick, but strong enough to prevent the animals getting into our traps when set at the foot of slides. Again, we obtained information from an old pelt hunter who said we should put a small bag of coarse salt under each set, for this would prevent freezing unless the weather was very cold. When we tried it, the plan worked successfully and we got several more skins.

By this time the muskrats became wary—or at least they seemed that way to us. With un-



OUR THIRD TRAP HELD SOMETHING, THE ANIMAL WAS TUGGING AWAY AT THE CHAIN.

baited traps we caught very few. However, by using some small apples we succeeded in taking eleven. Our method was to select a place not too deep and where the current proved strong enough, so that the ice would not bother. Then, on sticks inclined slightly, we put the decoy just above the water. The vegetables, of course, were guarded by steel traps.

As the season advanced we had to make most of our sets in deep water, with the exception of those at the mouths of the dens. So we used a slanting board. We shovied one end into the mud and supported the other with stakes so that the top of the board was fully six inches above the surface. On this top, we arranged a parsnip. Just beneath the water we drove some small nails to hold the trap in place. Common sense was the guide which taught us to place the ordinary style trap with the spring nearest the surface. Completing this, we smeared mud over the board. With this arrangement we took nine skins, for it seemed that every animal passing would attempt to climb the board to gnaw the vegetable and as a result get caught. Of course the staking was in deep water and the fur bearers would drown quickly. We didn't lose a single hide—and also learned that whenever possible the chains ought to be fastened in at least eighteen inches of water. Small lengths of bare wire also proved handy when the chains were too short.

Our collection of furs grew from day to day. Then—our traps were gone. Where? Tracks in the mud gave us no clue, for we had been careless in leaving signs.

"What will we do?" I asked. Jack scratched his head. "Do!" he repeated. "The only way I can see is to sell our furs and buy another outfit."

"Yes," was the reply. "Only where shall we sell?" "In the village, if we wish, to Sam Wolf. He buys furs, but he doesn't pay very much. Let's pick out one of the advertisers in 'Comfort' and give him a trial."

"Good," was my answer. Accordingly, we hurried home and from the publication selected a concern which from their talk certainly seemed to be fair and liberal. We sewed the pelts in a gunny sack, after having put our name and address inside the package, together with the number of skins and kind. Then we wrote the dealer and asked him to send a check.

Exactly three days afterwards, the returns came in.

With trembling fingers, Wallace opened the letter. It contained several dollars more than we actually expected and more than we should have received from our local dealer. "Now for the hardware store and some traps," I shouted. "Come on."

We lived about a mile and a half from town, but the distance soon was covered. There we selected a dozen and a half Number Ones and six "jumps" of the same size. The merchant gladly cashed our check and gave us the remainder. This Jack and I divided before starting home. The money jingling in our pockets made pleasant music as we tramped across the fields.

Adventure with Skunks

COLD weather came and muskrat trapping began to get poor. The animals were not very active and we had practically cleaned up our grounds. True, we could have made our sets farther down the stream, but if we had done this we should not have had the time to look after things properly, for we were going to school. Hence, we pulled up our traps and looked around for signs of mink, raccoon, opossum and skunk.

Our reading of all articles about trapping gave us information of great value. In the first place, we knew in a general way where to look for fur bearers, and then signs. Through a neighbor we learned the use of a flash-light which enabled us to search for tracks we should otherwise have passed by. Again, when we were dubious about a den which might be that of a skunk, all we had to do was to throw the rays into the hole and if we saw black, white, or black-and-white hair, we knew we could arrange our traps with a surety of getting fur.

Our folks gave us positive instructions not to trap skunk. Yet the price lists we received showed that it was well worth our time to make sets for them. Accordingly, we put our traps out.

The first set we made was in a weed patch, at the entrance to a burrow. No bait of any kind was used. While we caught three animals and killed them with a club, there was practically no odor. We early learned to staple our traps to some object which was too heavy for the animals to move or carry into the holes. A long pole proved effective, as did a piece of brush. As soon as we discovered this we had no trouble in moving our sets.

"Try this," said Wallace. "Let's build small three-sided pens where there are skunks, and use bloody meat as bait. We'll guard the lure with one or more traps. I read that if we did this we could take several pelts from the same den."

"It stands to reason," I agreed. "With burrow sets it is impossible for us to capture more than one skunk at a time from a hole. Let's get busy at once and see what we can do."

The next few hours we spent looking for likely

locations. With rocks, sticks and other material, we made the pens according to directions. For a decoy we used pieces of rabbit flesh.

When we finished, results seemed certain. We were up bright and early. Disappointment stared us in the face. Four of our traps were not sprung, yet the bait was gone. What got it? Neither of us knew. We baited again as before and went home sorely puzzled. The hired man on our farm—he had done some trapping—gave us a clew.

"You're fine ones," he said. "Don't you know that crows and hawks got the flesh? Go right back at once and cover the pens with a thin layer of weeds or brush."

Jack and I did so!

We had no trouble whatever catching skunk, for we found that the animals seemed to have no fear of the traps and would actually step into bright, new ones. Experience taught us, however, that if we hid our sets right, we could expect once in a while a mink or raccoon. They would not approach a bright new trap.

We learned that the proper way to conceal a set was to dig a small hole just large enough for the trap, so that when it was set the jaws were slightly below the surface of the ground. For a covering, the best thing was something that grew nearby—that is, green grass ought not to be employed when a set was made on dry ground. If dust or sand were used, we had to put a wad of cotton or wool under the pan so no foreign substance would hinder the trap from springing. Further, in digging the excavation we had to locate this so that the water did not drain into it and freeze. When this happens the trap is useless.

Jack wanted to try prepared scents.

"It's easy," he said. "All you have to do is to get some small fish and cut them up fine. Leave these rot in the sun and use the oil. The bait is good for all flesh-eating animals."

"We'll make some," I agreed.

This we did, and the result was a lure that proved reliable.

How to Trap

We caught skunk almost every day, with baited and unbaited sets. In fact, we had no trouble whatever in getting them ready for market without odor. We were about to devote all our time to taking this animal when the unexpected happened.

We got a large Broad Stripe in one of our traps near a small country school—but how to get him out was the problem. That skunk was a terror and the air certainly was scented.

This experience was new to us. We had handled our first sets with ease and did not know what to make of this last animal. Afterwards, we learned that some boys had teased the fur bearer—threw rocks and clubs at it. If this had not been done, most of the odor could have been eliminated. Thus we discovered something new about catching skunk.

Closer than a hundred feet we dared not venture. The animal stared at us defiantly. The thing must be killed, but how?

"Let's get Towser?" my companion suggested, referring to a dog that David Jones, another neighbor, owned.

I agreed—and yet dubiously. I knew Jones was particular about this half-grown pup.

"You go," I suggested. "Naw!" Jack rebelled. "Anyway, you can whistle louder. Just sneak behind his corn crib and call the dog." So I started off while my partner watched the skunk.

Luck came my way. A couple of hundred yards from the Jones' place the pup was industriously barking and digging at a hole. It took some persuasion upon my part to get Towser to leave, but after I fastened a string around his neck, he came trotting along.

The dog needed no further urging. As soon as he saw the skunk he gave one jerk and was free. Straight toward the fur bearer animal was ready—and

Everything happened at once. The air was "blue." Towser sneezed; gave the skunk a final shake; walked a few feet and

We brought water from a schoolhouse pump in an old tin can, but we couldn't get the pup to notice it. What to do we had no idea, for if David knew—

"Hey! What you kids doing?"

Jones hailed us from the road. We had not noticed him approach. Wallace and I were incapable of speech until we saw the amused grin on his face.

"Trappin'," I stammered.

Jack nodded.

"So I see—or rather smell," he remarked. "And with my dog, too. Well, you hike home now and don't go nearer that 'stink cat' or your folks won't even

let you sleep in the barn. The dog can come home when he gets ready—and I hope it won't be before next week. He's sick all right but nothing serious. Glad you got that 'cat,' for it will save me a lot of chickens. And say—ain't the pup a game one?"

Once more at our ease, we sauntered off, never suspecting that there was the slightest odor on our clothes. The hired man told us as we walked into the barn at our place.

"Suffer'n' cats!" he ejaculated. "You'll catch it now. Whew!"

My partner and I both sniffed.

We could detect no smell whatever. Further, we had not been near the skunk, so how could there be?

"You're fooling us," Jack retorted hopefully. "You think—"

"Nothing of the sort. The air has carried the smell into your clothes. Now you two kids go out into the corn crib and take some gasoline. Soak a cloth in it and then go over your duds. After that, walk down to the further meadow and drive up the cows. The fumes will be evaporated by that time and I hope all the

so—
and it was true.

Another trick—if we might call it that—was killing these fur bearers without odor. Jim told us to shoot the skunk just back of the head so that the bullet cut the spine. This paralyzed the animal and kept it from throwing its fluid. Welch had a long-barreled pistol which he said he would let us use provided we took good care of it. He told us that any short-barreled weapon was dangerous.

Welch also pointed out that care must be taken not to excite the animal, and he told us to have the bullet come out in the neck so the skin was



WE GOT A BROAD STRIPE IN OUR TRAPS NEAR A SMALL COUNTRY SCHOOL.

he flew. The trapped smell. And say," he added, "be sure you have no matches in your pocket."

Wallace and I followed directions. When we returned, the hired man pronounced us all right.

Lessons in Mink Trapping

OUR catch of furs gradually accumulated. With the aid of Jim Welch, the man who worked for father, we learned many things which were of value to us on the trap line. For one thing, he showed us how to skin skunk without puncturing the scent bag which lies at the root of the tail. "You kids," he said, "ought to cut around these glands, leaving a small patch of fur. This does not affect the value of the hide in the least."

We could hardly believe it—but then since Jim had trapped for years, we were forced to do

so—and it was true.

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Welch also pointed out that care must be taken not to excite the animal, and he told us to have the bullet come out in the neck so the skin was

not damaged. "If you puncture the belly," he stated, "you cannot get as much for the fur as it would otherwise be worth. Remember this before shooting."

"But what about skunk oil?" I asked, knowing it was prized by certain people for colds. "We can render it out and—"

"Better not waste your time," was the answer, "unless you want it yourself. So far as I know, there is no real market for skunk oil."

During the next few months we caught a number of skunk and had no trouble whatever. But as the weather got colder, the animals denned up and did not travel much. Then we decided to go after mink, of which there were a few signs along the streams.

"How will we catch them?" I asked.

"Let's ask Jim."

"All right."

Accordingly we sought out the hired man.

When we told him what we were after, he shook his head. "I'm afraid," he answered, "these animals are too cunning for you. In fact, many professionals find them very difficult to take. However, I know some sets which are bound to bring results, provided you make them as they should be.

Naturally, we promised to do it.

"In the first place," our teacher continued, "the best locations for the mink are along the small, slow streams. The reason for this is that the banks of these are usually overgrown with weeds so as to hide the dens. Further, the channels are choked with drift-wood, giving the fur bearers chance to hunt unobserved, and the shallows contain small fish, crabs, etc., which the animals can get with little trouble.

"You must leave no signs of your presence, and last, but not least, have your sets arranged so that the place looks the same after your visit as before. The male mink is a wanderer, often traveling miles in a night, while the female rarely goes farther than a half mile from its den. You can tell the track of the male from the female at this time of the year by the size, for the former will be larger.

"You will have the best results when the sets are in water. If you can find places under overhanging banks where the animals travel, scoop out excavations for your sets and trust to luck. Probably you will not get many furs until you have had considerable experience, but then you can get that only by trying.

"If you find places where the mink enter the water, place traps, using no bait whatever. Stake your sets where it is deep, so the fur bearers will drown when caught. During cold weather—understand the mink will travel regardless of the temperature—the best sets are arranged at springs and the mouths of tiles."

"Can we use bait?"

"Surely—only don't do it if you can arrange a blind set."

"What's a 'blind set'?"

He looked at us in surprise. "You ought to know," he replied. "It is a set with no lure whatever, and hidden."

Jack and I, who had caught most of our furs by this method, looked foolish. "Anyway," we persisted, "won't bait lure the animals?"

"Certainly, but it has to be used just right. That fish oil you made is dandy, provided you employ it as it should be. However, with the sets I have described, you do not need it."

We two sat listening, trying as best we could to learn all about the art of trapping. Jim, it seemed, had had considerable experience, and we were more than glad to have his help.

"But when do we use decoy?" Jack inquired.

"Whenever you can't catch them any other way," is a good rule to follow. Of course, once

in a while an attractor is necessary, and, when it is, small bits of muskrat or rabbit work fine, especially if your fish lure is used in connection with it."

"Give us a sure set," I pleaded, "something—"

"There are no sure sets. About as good a one as I know is to dig small pockets along the edges of a steep bank and put the decoy in the back part so the water will not touch it. When you place traps like this, it is best to wade along a stream and leave no tracks in the mud; that is, as few tracks or signs as possible. If you are able to do this, you will find you have advanced considerably."

"But—"

"Suffering eats!"—Jim's favorite expression. "I see that I will have to find time to show you fellows how to arrange your traps. But if I do, you will have to help me with my work. I have some harnesses to oil, and you kids can get busy right now."

"It's ago!" we shouted.

Accordingly, we "got busy" and helped the hired man with his work. In fact, we showed our appreciation in every way we could, for we realized that Welch had caught furs before and knew just how to make the sets and prepare the skins for market.

That afternoon we labored with a will. The next morning, bright and early, we started out with our traps, hoping to catch a number of mink on Beaver Bend.

The ice had formed a thin crust on the creek. Jim took the lead and passed by places where my partner and I thought we could take pelts. "Don't bother with 'em," our instructor remarked. "Go down where the drains empty and there you will get results."

There were several tiles flowing into the stream. When we came to these places we did not spend much time except to see where there were tracks. The sets were made with the Newhouse style traps and the springs were farthest from the drains.

"If there are no signs," Jim explained, "reverse the position. By this I mean have the jaws farthest from the tiles."

Both of us declared we understood.

"Now, there," Welch pointed, "is a dandy place to take the mink. See that hollow log?" We nodded.

"Put a trap at each entrance and use no decoy.



WE WATCHED HIM ARRANGE THE TRAPS, WADING IN THE CREEK FOR A DISTANCE BEFORE REACHING THE SPOT AND AFTER LEAVING IT.

If the water is too deep, build a base for the sets; if too shallow, scoop out an excavation. The first fur bearer coming along will try to enter, and get caught, provided the sets are properly made."

We watched him arrange the traps, wading in the creek for a distance before reaching the spot and after leaving it. "You will notice," he explained, "that after I touched the log I splashed water over it to destroy the human

scent. Always do this when after the mink."

"How are we going to remember it all?" I asked.

"Easy enough," Jim answered. "You will absorb the little details as you become more experienced on the trap line."

Frankly, this was not encouraging, since we had listened to so much advice that we hardly knew where we were at. Nevertheless, we were anxious to learn and do our very best.

The Windup of The Season

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HE next day it snowed.

The weather became colder and colder and the strong north wind drove the ice-like flakes with the velocity of shot. However, we did not let this deter us from visiting our traps, and well were we pleased when our first set contained a medium brown mink. It was alive and at our approach pulled the trap into the tile.

"Be careful," the hired man warned us. "Let's see if it is caught securely. I lost three pelts when I first began because I was in too big a haste."

We examined the hold of the jaws. They were clamped securely on one of the hind legs of the animal. "You got him, all right," my partner exclaimed. "Now a shot—"

"Hold on," our teacher interrupted, "you'll spoil the hide."

We waited expectantly.

"The way to do it is to get the mink so you can stun it with a blow on the head. Then, to avoid blood clots on the skin, crush in the ribs with your hands."

The man illustrated his advice with a demonstration, explaining that while stains on the leather do not really affect the value of fur, at the same time it pays in dollars and cents to have the pelts look as well as possible.

"Where will we set the trap?" I asked.

"Just where it was," came the reply. "You see, when you catch one mink at a spot you are almost sure to take another. Now, Jack, show us just how to make this set, as I showed you yesterday."

My partner started to scrape away the surplus dirt that the animal had torn up. "Don't disturb anything" was the injunction. "Always leave conditions just as you find them. Here, hide that chain and then dash water over the set so as to destroy the odor."

We marveled at the skill the farm hand showed. There was so much to learn about trapping, we despaired of ever mastering the art. And yet with a knowledge of the habits of the fur bearers, combined with common sense, we somehow knew that we should succeed.

The next traps were empty and one of them was frozen so it was useless. We found there was little hope of getting mink in places where the water had receded, leaving the sets high and dry. Our instructor took up the traps, and then selecting a shallow place in the stream,

placed the sets on bags of coarse salt, which I had to go back and get. He said that if the weather did not get too cold the salt would prevent freezing and that mink are sure to enter the open water at every opportunity when traveling back and forth.

"Something else for us to remember," Jack said.

"Yes," I answered.

Farther down the stream where we had another tile set, we found a small mink, frozen stiff. It was a female which, as the farm hand stated, rarely got larger than the medium size.

We hastened home, for it was almost time to feed the horses. We, too, were hungry—and even more proud, for we had taken two skins which would bring about seven dollars. Trapping had not only proven a pleasure to us but a source of knowledge about wild life. Best of all was the cash—easy money, so to speak, which almost any farm boy can earn in his spare time.

During the next week we caught three more mink, and two muskrats, which were now at their best. The thick, glossy fur of the latter was quite different from the thin-pealed skins we had taken in the fall. It did not take much comparison to see why the buyers could—and would—pay more for the late winter "rats" than for those caught in the fall.

Skunk continued to den up. They had lain in the burrows for weeks. In fact, we had almost forgotten about them when the hired man called our attention to these fur bearers by saying:

"Warm spell coming."

"Yes," I agreed, more from force of habit than actual knowledge of the weather.

"Skunk'll be out tonight."

"Will they?"—surprised.

"You bet."

"Will you help?" was my answer.

"Yes. As soon as you are finished, go get Jack and we will see what we can do. I have had an eye on several places and with the pen sets such as you two made and an attractive bait, you ought to get a good haul."

I hurried with my work as fast as possible. Soon I was at my partner's house and found him just as eager to place the traps as I. In a short while we were back and waiting.

Down the stream we walked, pulling up sets which had not given results for weeks. Our



"IT'S A COON!" JACK EXCLAIMED.

teacher said there were chances of success with them yet, but not so good as those for taking skunks. However, he would not touch the tile sets, for he said that mink also run "when the weather is soft," and undoubtedly we should catch several pets that night. To me this seemed doubtful, for I had not seen signs for quite a long time, even though we had been along the creek daily.

One trap was lost. It had been gone for days.

"Something carried it away," Jim mumbled, when we told him.

We said nothing.

"It wasn't staked good," he remarked a few minutes later.

And then under some weeds near the edge of the water we found the missing Victor with a small mink in it, pale in color.

"Look!" Jack shouted.

Before I could answer, the hired man had the fur bearer in his hands and was pulling the fur. "Not tainted," he said presently, "and yet it is a wonder that it isn't. With the freezing and thawing, most of them spoil. However, if this grades a number two I shall be satisfied."

"But why?" was my question. "It was caught—"

"That doesn't make any difference," was the reply. "The leather will show blue when it is dry, even though the fur is as good as the prime. Nevertheless, dealers will not buy it for first quality and cannot sell it as such. And"—he added, as an afterthought—"this very thing causes the misinformed to complain about the prices they receive when it really isn't the buyers' fault at all."

It was not long until we had what traps we needed and were on our way to the pasture where the skunk dens were located. We made our sets so carefully that they met with the approval of the man who had taught us so many things about making money with steel traps.

The next days were busy ones for us. We took eight skunk before the weather got colder and the animals stopped running. However, at a tile we discovered a trap missing and strange tracks, somewhat resembling the imprint of a baby's foot.

"What is it?" Jack asked.

"I don't know."

We were undecided what to do when something stirred in the brush a few yards distant. Both of us started on the run to investigate.

"It's a 'coon!" Jack exclaimed. "I saw one once that the Duncan boys caught with their hounds. Gee, it's a whopper!"

With a club we killed the fur bearer. It was not until that time we noticed that the soft pine stake had been gnawed in two. "We've learned something else," I remarked, "even though the animal wandered into the set. While there are not many around here, at the same time we will know when we put out traps for them to use a strong fastening."

School started again and we did not have much time to devote to anything else. However, we managed to look at our sets each morning and we took a few skins. Later, when it thawed, we had better luck, but as soon as the freshet came booming down, we pulled up our sets and sold our catch. The hired man told us that skunk get springy first and of poor quality, followed by the raccoon and mink. By "springy" he meant the fur was commencing to shed—in fact, the hide had deteriorated so they were nearly worthless. Muskrat are good longer but ought not to be taken after they begin to mate.

Jack and I received sixty-eight dollars for our last lot, and were well pleased. The season had been profitable and had paid us generously for our spare time.

The traps were washed carefully, then greased with tallow. After this, we hung them in the shed where it was dry, and next October we shall find them ready to be set again.

Where to Look For Signs of Animals

THE young trapper is handicapped for the reason that he does not know where to look for signs of the animals. Unlike the professional, he is not trained to see this mark—that track—which indicates where a fur bearer can be caught. In fact, the novice trusts largely to luck in the location of his sets, and to remedy this he must become a close observer of conditions. Time spent in doing this pays big.

In order that the young trapper may know just where to look for tracks and signs of fur bearers, I will briefly point them out:

SKUNK AND CIVET CAT.—Around weed patches, along old hedges, in dried-up creek bottoms, under abandoned houses and barns. As a rule, both animals prefer to locate their dens where it is rough and stony.

MINK.—Small streams are best suited to this fur bearer. They offer concealment for the burrows, also an abundance of small fish, mussels, and similar foods that are easy to obtain. Do not neglect flowing tiles, half-submerged hollow logs and slides around roots which overhang the water.

WEASEL (ERMINE).—No definite places can be given except where there is an abundance of food and game to be killed. (The weasel will kill purely for the sake of killing, even when it has all it can eat.) Around stone and post piles, good catches have been made. Often weed patches yield several skins, especially if the ground is rough and somewhat rocky.

MUSKRAT.—Always near or on water. Shallow lakes, marshes and streams offer the best places to look for them.

RACCOON AND OPOSSUM.—The former is usually close to water. Swamps are good trapping grounds, particularly in the South. The 'possum likes woods, and it is an old saying that the deeper the thicket, the more opossum. Small ditches often supply the trapper with excellent places for sets.

The use of a small tubular flashlight, made especially for pelt hunters, will prove a great aid to the young pelt hunter. For instance, he can examine places under shelving banks for mink without disturbing the roots. With the rays he can see tracks and signs which otherwise would be never noticed.

Again, the flashlight may be employed in distinguishing between dens used by the skunk and civet cat and other animals. If black, white, or black and white hairs, are observed along the sides of the burrows, one may make his sets with chances of getting fur instead of rabbits. In many places rabbits use holes very similar to the dens of the skunk and civet. Of course the experienced trapper generally has but little trouble in telling the difference, but the tyro needs a light. In selecting this, it is best to get one that can be carried handily in the coat pocket. Be sure a good one is purchased so that it can be depended upon when needed. Use the flashlight every day and see how soon you will be able to get used to the various tracks and signs the furbearers leave.

Baits and Scents to Use Trapping

THERE are many patent baits and scents upon the market today, some of which are good, others fairly good—and some absolutely worthless. The competition for furs makes a lure almost a necessity, but it should not force the novice to buy a bait simply because the manufacturer recommends it highly. On the other hand, the beginner in most cases does not need bait to catch fur bearers as much as he needs a knowledge of where and how to place his traps.

We admit, however, that attractors are almost a necessity. While there are several I should not hesitate to recommend among those offered for sale, space does not permit me to enumerate just which they are. Nevertheless, in order not to disappoint my reader, I will show him how to make his own decoy, as effective as much of it is sold at fancy prices. Even if this lure is not the best, at the same time it will attract the animals into sets, and that is what we want.

Most beginners are located in rural districts where the houses are not far apart. It is evident that many of the fur bearers get an abundance of food from the farms. For this reason, our bait must be something different from meat or vegetables such as the animals get, as a rule, in abundance.

Generally speaking, the smaller fur bearers may be divided into two classes—those that eat flesh and those that do not. Of course, the raccoon will eat both, so we will discuss it separately later.

The skunk, civet cat, mink, opossum and weasel eat meat. For bait make an oil by chopping up fish fine and letting it rot in an open-mouthed jar. A few drops of this will invariably draw the fur bearers mentioned.

For muskrats—and most professionals do not use much attractor for catching them, since it is unnecessary—beaver castors and alcohol are good. Chop up the castor fine and pour on the liquid until covered. Let it stand tightly corked

a few days and the attractor is ready for use. Beaver castors may be obtained from almost any large fur house, drug store, etc. Only a very little is necessary to produce results.

A good draw for 'coon is made by pouring honey into a mixture of alcohol anise oil and rhodium. Canned salmon, or the juice of it is excellent also. When after the opossum, few baits are better than ordinary sardines put up in oil.

Never put the bait on the trap. This has a tendency to scare away the fur bearers by calling their attention to the sets. While I say never to do this, there is one exception I should mention perhaps and that is this: A bright object such as tin or piece of looking glass fixed to the pan, provided the jaws are hidden, will cause the raccoon to investigate. This it does with a paw, trying to scoop the bright object out of the water. If the set has been made properly, of course the animal is caught.

Fresh, bloody meat is good, as a rule, for all small fur bearers with the exception of the muskrat. During cold weather, frozen flesh loses some of its power to attract. On the other hand, when it is warm, meat does not always give the best results either. To use bait successfully, the pelt hunter must keep constantly experimenting. What is excellent one place may prove worthless, or nearly so, in another. Again, a lure that gives results for an animal one place does not always a short distance away. That is why one trapper will state that muskrat flesh is best for mink while some other, just as successful perhaps, prefers rabbit, fish or small birds.

Most beginners use too much bait and in places where it is unnecessary. As a rule, I should not advise the employment of a decoy unless the set could not be made in any other way. If meat is used for any of the smaller animals, a little will go a great ways. And so it is with the scent. A few drops is enough. Too much often causes the fur bearers to become suspicious and leave when otherwise they would have been taken.

How to Prepare for The Fur Season

MILLIONS will be paid in the next few months for raw furs. A large per cent of this money will go directly into the hands of those who take the smaller animals. These traps for the most part are farmer boys and those who live in the rural communities. The first thing the pelt hunter should do is to locate his grounds. This ought to be done early; weeks or months before a set is made. By planning the "line," one can locate the various dens and runways and know approximately how many traps to employ.

Pelt hunters do not realize how great their loss is by taking the skins before they are of good quality. Some states have laws prohibiting trapping until after the first of October—and some even later. Generally speaking, pelts secured before the first of November any place in the United States are not of good quality.

Just before the first cold weather is probably the best time to study the actions of the fur bearers, for at this time they are especially busy storing up food and preparing their winter quarters.

As to the number of traps to set, one must decide largely for himself. No more sets ought to be made than can be attended to properly. For the beginner who has but a limited time at his disposal each day, probably a dozen or two traps will be enough. Of course if the trapper is after muskrats, a greater number of sets can generally be looked after than if the pelt hunter must cover miles in search of mink, skunk and raccoon. The fact that the "line" is near or far from home must always be taken into consideration, along with the character of the ground; whether hard to travel or easy.

The genuine Newhouse is the best trap manufactured. However, there are some cheaper brands on the market which will answer every purpose for smaller animals. Among these are the Victor, a choice of an army of pelt hunters; the High Grip, so built that it catches high on the legs and lessens the chances of the fur bearers to pull out, etc., etc. All of these are of the Newhouse style. Then there are the popular Jump, Leap and Kangaroo traps. These actually leap when sprung, insuring a good hold on the

animal. While the styles mentioned will be found sufficient, let me add that such as the Stop Thief, Tree Trap and others also merit attention.

In discussing size in traps, the novice had best use that which the makers recommend for the particular animals. Even professional pelt hunters disagree often as to size. For instance, I prefer the No. 0 for muskrats, as it is strong enough to hold the animals if properly set and does not break the leg bones so easily as the larger sizes. Unless the pelt hunter is experienced, I should not advise him to experiment with the small-sized trap when after muskrats, for it may cost him quite a few skins during the season.

Traps ought never to be set when new. Rust them first. Personally, I prefer to wire my bunch together and bury for a week or so in silty mud which will give them a dead black color. Some rust their traps slightly, then stain with a "paint" made by boiling walnut husks and water. Test all traps before setting. If they spring too hard, bend the trigger slightly or use a file. If they work too easily, bend the trigger rest sufficiently in the proper direction. Search for defective chains. Should a trap not be in good working order, don't run the chance of losing a skin by employing it.

The amateur, no doubt, will want some information on where to locate the dens of the different fur bearers.

The skunk and civet cat—the latter, generally speaking, is confined principally to the territory west of the Mississippi river—it is fond of rough stony ground, especially if covered with weeds and brush. These animals seem to have no fear of man nor nearness of human habitation. It is not unusual to find them under houses, in barns, under hay and straw piles and similar places. Along old hedges seems a favorite place for the animals also.

The mink generally prefers to have its den along a small stream, rather than a large, open one. The reason is that the small stream offers it better opportunities for remaining concealed, as there is usually plenty of driftwood and weeds, along the bank.

The raccoon is never found very far from woods and water. The opossum prefers the deep, dark forest.

The weasel (known also as the ermine) is found almost any place where there is food or something to be killed which it is large enough to handle. In sod fields, along dried-up creek bottoms, stone piles, etc., it may be trapped.

The muskrat is always near water. These animals are most numerous in swamps, shallow lakes and streams.

How to Trap The Fox

THE fox is one of the hardest of all fur-bearing animals to trap. Its sense of smell is so keen—its animal instinct so well developed—that even the professional has difficulty in getting the furs. In fact, the wolf is no more wary than the fox.

Traps should be perfectly clean and never handled with the naked hands. It is best to smoke them over a fire of green boughs or feathers. Gloves ought to be used in making sets, the palms of which are thickly coated with beeswax. Rubbing them in earth or dipping in blood is effective also to remove the odor.

After traps are placed for the fox, it is best not to go closer than fifty or a hundred feet to see if they have been disturbed. Never take a dog over the line, for this will surely scare the game.

For snow sets, traps may be whitened by immersing in lime and water. Care must be used in handling, otherwise the "paint" will rub off.

A good scent for foxes is desirable. Some of the patent mixtures are fine. However, a home-made attractor can be compounded by letting small fish rot in an open-mouthed jar and adding to the oil thus secured (1) the scent bags of a skunk, (2) scent bag of a mink, (3) some alcohol. Of course the best draw is made from the generative glands of the fox during mating season. Add a small quantity of alcohol. A few drops of this will seldom fail to bring results.

As I said before, the fox is hard to capture. With skill one can arrange traps well concealed in brush, using some of the decoy mentioned or a chicken for lure. In the latter case it is best to wait until the fowl is rotten. At this time it draws better.

Rotten eggs are used in some localities with success when after the fox. Of course the bait should never be on the trap, but nearby in such a position that the animal in investigating will get caught.

One of the best methods of trapping the fox, especially for beginners, is: Wade down a stream where there are signs of fox and make the set where the animals come nearest to the edge of the water. About two feet from shore put the

trap in shallow water, concealing the jaws with moss, leaves, etc. Beyond this, place some of the scent mentioned and also a bait, preferably a chicken or rabbit. On the pan of the trap near the surface of the water, put a small piece of sod so it stands up and resembles a solid footing. The fox in locating such a set will endeavor, in case it is made correctly, to get the decoy without wetting its feet. As a result it will step on the sod-covered pan and get caught.

One should not enter the water nor leave in the vicinity of a trap placed in the manner I have described. To do so would render the chances of success small.

Similar sets may also be made at springs or other places where there are pools of water. Particularly are these valuable if they do not freeze.

Old trappers often "bait a place" for these animals and get them in the habit of feeding there before the season opens. When this is done the animals seem to lose some of their cunning and can be captured easier than otherwise. Frequently sets may be made near carcasses of cattle. The powdered manure from the stomach is generally used as a covering for the traps. One must make every effort to have his sets carefully hidden, otherwise they will prove of little value in getting fur.

Where foxes are run by dogs they seem more shy than when not molested, and cannot be captured so easily. In fact traps concealed in paths which the animals use, often get the fur bearers.

Other methods will suggest themselves to the pelt hunter when after the fox. Almost any of them used for the skunk may be employed to good advantage, provided they are made carefully. The great thing to avoid is human odor. Remember, it requires great practice to get results, so do not be discouraged if the first few attempts fail.

How to Trap Skunk, Civet, Raccoon and Opossum

THE skunk and civet cat are easy to take. They seem to have no fear of springing a bright new trap that is not concealed. While, therefore, it is not necessary to conceal traps for this animal, I would advise doing so, as one can thus often take a wandering mink or raccoon.

To conceal land sets, one should scoop out a hole large enough so that the jaws are just below the surface. If fine material is employed, such as dirt and rotten wood, it is best to place a wad of cotton or wool under the pan so nothing can get under it and interfere with the action when sprung. Always use a covering natural to the place—that is, dead leaves when sets are made in dead leaves; green grass when sets are made on green grass, etc. In cold weather, line the excavation with dry material such as leaves, etc., before arranging the set, to prevent the trap from freezing to the ground. Traps so placed must be examined from time to time and the bed of dry material changed.

There are usually several skunks or civet cats in each den. While sets may be arranged at the mouths of burrows, I prefer to use baited traps placed in the immediate vicinity of the burrows. One may thus take several skunks and civets in a single night from a single burrow.

Built small V-shaped pens in the vicinity of the burrows. Use bloody meat for a decoy, covered with a small quantity of grass so that it is hidden from crows and hawks. Guard the lure with one or more traps.

I have found that good results may be obtained when small excavations are dug and a Kangaroo or Jump trap is concealed on top of a piece of meat. The animals in digging for the decoy will be caught.

Warm, moonlight nights are best for taking the two fur bearers mentioned. They are more active at this time, and den up, generally speaking, when the weather gets real cold.

Some who are starting to trap for the first time will have trouble in locating occupied dens; you can learn to tell them by the general appearance—if the entrance seems used, if there are tracks about and droppings—but a surer method is to reach into the den as far as possible and take up a handful or two of dirt. In this dirt, if the den is used by the skunk or civet, will generally be found long black, black and white, or white hair.

When employing meat for bait, remember it will attract dogs and cats also. Baited sets, therefore, ought not to be made too close to human habitation.

The beginner, no doubt, will hesitate to trap both the skunk and civet because of the odor. With care, however, they may be taken with little inconvenience. When an animal is taken in a trap and is alive, do not excite it more than is necessary. A small caliber rifle or pistol is best to employ for killing. Shoot the animals just back of the head so that the bullets cut the spine and paralyze it.

When shooting fur bearers, remember that holes in the pelt—back or belly—affect the values of the skins. If possible, shoot so the bullets range from the back of the head downward, out the neck.

Should a skin be "stunk up" or some of the odor get on the clothes, it may be removed by thoroughly washing, one or more times, in gasoline. Do this outdoors and be sure to let the vapor evaporate thoroughly before taking it indoors, otherwise there is danger from fire.

The raccoon and opossum are much harder to take than either the skunk or civet cat, as their animal instinct is better developed. Unless the novice makes his sets in water, he is liable to have some difficulty in taking many pelts.

The raccoon is very strong, considering its size. I should recommend nothing smaller than a Number 1½ trap. Further, fasten all traps in deep water when able to do it and avoid the use of small stakes also. The 'coon frequently when caught will gnaw its way loose. My method of fastening traps for this fur bearer is to wire them to rocks, etc., weighing from twenty to twenty-five pounds each, which cannot be dragged off. For the opossum, however, it is optional whether one employs the Number 1 or 1½.

When tracks of the 'coon are found—even the beginner cannot mistake them, for they resemble very closely the imprint of a baby's foot—build a small three-sided pen of rocks or sticks in shallow water not too far from shore. In the back part of this place a bait, guarding it with one or more concealed traps. When making sets of this kind it is best to leave as few signs as possible.

The raccoon is the only one of the smaller fur bearers which will eat both flesh and vegetables seemingly with little preference. Like its larger brother, the bear, it always appears hungry, so a good bait is almost a necessity. Among those which I have employed successfully are: corn, fresh fish, clams, honey and canned salmon. I might also add that a patent lure will often prove of value.

If a large hollow log is found partly submerged along a stream, place traps at each entrance-way. If the water is too deep, scoop out an excavation for the traps; if too shallow, generally a foundation for the sets may be made of rocks, sticks, mud, etc. I aim to have my sets covered with from three to four inches of water and concealed with soaked grass, leaves or moss. Employ no lure of any kind with the set. I have just given, for the first 'coon passing either up or down the stream will attempt to enter the log and, if the traps are placed properly, get caught. The log set is employed quite extensively for taking the mink also. Only those logs having large hollows can be expected to furnish ideal places for taking the raccoon.

Often natural places may be discovered along the edge of a stream or lake where there are signs of the fur bearers. When you find such a place, simply conceal traps there. Sets in runways are effective also, provided, of course, the



LAND SET. CONCEALS THE TRAP WITH A COVERING NATURAL TO THE PLACE.

pelt hunter is skillful enough to place his traps properly. They must be concealed thoroughly; there should be little human scent, which means clean traps; and last, but not least, after the sets have been made the ground should look the same as before the traps were arranged.

I have found that comb honey smeared on rocks which protrude above the water not too far from shore, is very effective in attracting the raccoon.

The opossum in the past has been known to

the trade as a "cheap fur." During the last two years, however, pelts have been in excellent demand and they are almost sure to be this coming winter and spring.

Both the opossum and raccoon are considered a delicacy by many and often a market may be found for the carcass. When this is true, trapping these fur bearers is profitable indeed.

Practically every method mentioned for taking the raccoon may be employed in catching the possum.

How to Trap the Mink, Weasel, and Muskrat

THE mink is one of the hardest of all small fur-bearing animals to take in steel traps. It has a keen sense of smell and is very suspicious, so I advise the beginner to confine his efforts to traps placed in water.

The weasel (ermine) has not as keen animal instinct. It may be trapped by the beginner, provided he uses an attractive lure and knows how to conceal his sets fairly well.

Under old bridges—especially if the sides are made of rock—are good places to make sets for mink. If there are "slides" leading into the water, all one needs to do is to place his traps at the bottom, in two or three inches of water. Whenever possible, I should advise the fastening to be made where it is deep, for in this case the animal will dive when caught, tangle the chain, and drown.

If two streams come together at a sharp angle, tunnel from one to the other so that the water will flow through the excavation. Place a trap at each entrance. This tunnel will furnish an ideal place for trapping the mink as long as the water does not freeze, for every fur bearer passing will attempt to enter in search of food. I should advise that all mud, etc., from the excavation be disposed of and that each entrance be concealed, or partly concealed, with weeds or grass, giving the place a natural appearance. Dash water over the sets after completed.

Flowing tiles are good places to take the mink. If there are no tracks about, place the trap with the spring near the drain. If there are signs, reverse the trap. Should the tile be stopped up, dig it out.

Along the edges of the water, dig shallow pockets. In the back part, place a small piece of muskrat flesh. Guard this with one or more traps. Remember, if water is dashed over places where sets are made, all human odor will be destroyed.

Fish and small frogs are good bait. A reliable patent lure will invariably prove a wise investment when trapping the mink.⁴

Build small V-shaped pens in shallow water where there are signs of the mink. In the back part place a meat bait. Guard with one or more traps. If one can arrange this set and drape it

with leaves or grass to give it a natural appearance, it will prove more effective.

In very small, shallow creeks make a dam with small stakes a few inches apart, leaving one or two openings a few inches wide. When the current is swift, brush, etc., will probably collect. This must be taken away. In the openings are good places for traps. Further, when the ice freezes and the animals travel beneath it, these sets will often produce wonderful results.

In springs or flowing tides which do not freeze, good sets may often be arranged for the mink.

When streams are frozen and the weather is not too cold, chop a hole in the ice where the water is not deep and the current not too swift. Lower into the hole a bag of coarse salt, placing the trap on top of it.

The salt will have a tendency to prevent freezing, and the first mink passing will attempt to enter the water. If the set has been made properly, the animal will be caught. The best time to make a set of this kind is late in the evening, so there will be less chance of the trap being covered with ice.

Land sets may also be employed. Success with these depends largely upon one's ability to conceal his traps. Be very sure your traps are perfectly clean and have no odor. Wear gloves the palms of which have been thickly coated with beeswax, in making the sets. Have the place look as natural after as before the trap was placed. Rubbing the gloves with fresh

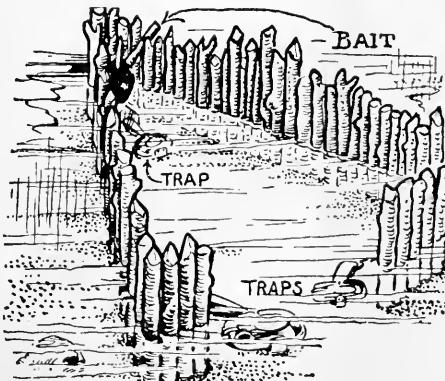
earth or dipping them in blood before handling the traps often will help also.

Warm, rainy nights are best for trapping the mink. It is more active at this time than when extremely cold.

The first thing one should do in trapping the weasel is to find its hunting grounds. Almost any kind of a meat bait will prove effective. A concealed trap, with the head of a rabbit for lure, placed under an upturned sod, should be effective.

The muskrat is able to adapt itself to "encroaching civilization" and does not seem to mind whether human habitation is near or not, so long as food can be obtained. Generally speaking, the muskrat is found all over America.

The muskrat is the only one of the smaller animals that eats vegetables exclusively. The



WATER SET. BUILD SMALL V-SHAPED PENS IN SHALLOW WATER WHERE THERE ARE SIGNS OF THE MINK.

best baits—of the natural kind—are apples, corn, parsnips, potatoes, carrots, or in fact almost any vegetable that the muskrats could not get easily for themselves. If the animals have an abundance of corn near them, use apples. The idea is to offer them something that they cannot easily get in nearby fields.

Most muskrats are taken early in the season, notwithstanding the fact that they get their best pelts late in winter and spring. The reason for this is obvious when one considers that during the cold weather the muskrat is not very active.

Most pelt hunters prefer the Number One trap for taking this fur bearer. This will be found very effective, especially if the fastening may be made in deep water so the animals will drown when caught.

The easiest way to catch the muskrat is to arrange traps at the foot of slides—usually not too close together—in about three inches of water. I mention this depth for the reason that traps placed in shallower water invariably catch the fur bearers by the short and weak front legs, rather than by the longer and stronger hind ones. Employ no bait of any kind. If the water is too deep, build a foundation of mud, stones or other material; if too shallow, scoop out an excavation.

In shallow water, build small mounds, the tops of which are just above the surface. Scoop out

excavations and conceal with water-soaked leaves or grass, traps. The excavations ought to be deep enough so that when the traps are in position they will be covered with water. It is not necessary to employ a lure. Muskrats traveling up or down the stream will climb the mounds and may get caught.

Often runways may be found leading from one shallow pond to another. These are water trails, probably a foot or so wide and a few inches deep.

Traps set at the entrances almost invariably are successful.

Another good plan is to place small pieces of bait on a small, inclined stick. The parsnip is very good because of its pungent odor. Under the decoys set one or more traps.

I have taken the skins in the following manner: First, I arrange a pumpkin in shallow water, build a sort of fence around the pumpkin with sticks, leaving three or four openings guarded with traps.

In shallow water, incline a board at a sharp angle, one end firmly wedged in the mud and the other a few inches above the surface of the water. This board ought to be about six inches wide, supported at one end with two stakes holding it firmly. Arrange two nails at a suitable depth below the water to catch and hold the trap securely. On the board, above the water, place the bait. A muskrat in climbing the board will get caught.

Spring Trapping

THIE coming of spring means the end of the trapper's work. All winter he has followed the trap line, sometimes pleased, and again suffering disappointment, yet, after all, the occupation has been a healthful one, and profitable as well, if the trapper has been industrious and willing to work.

As winter breaks up in the northern latitudes, animals start to "shed," that is, lose their heavy, fine fur, and as the weather becomes warmer, soon nothing but coarse hair remains.

The muskrat, a water animal, is at its best during the spring months. Trappers turn their attention to trapping this rodent, and some years find that it pays.

The muskrat is found in all parts of the United States, Alaska and Canada. Its home is around the lakes, ponds, marshes, creeks and rivers, or any swamp. They live in dens in the banks of the stream, with the entrance under water or close to the edge. In the ponds and marshes they build houses out in the water, where it is shallow, and oftentimes quite a number occupy the same house.

The musk of the female muskrat makes a very good scent to catch the male. Vegetable foods are best bait for muskrat. Corn, beets, parsnips, apples and the like, prove luring.

It is in the spring when meat bait fails. The trapper should be sure to purchase a prepared scent. If you try one firm's without success, keep trying until you run onto the right bait. As soon as you have found a scent that will decoy the muskrat to your trap, the battle is won.

A good way to fix a trap in a water-set so as to drown the muskrat is to take a piece of No. 9 wire, five or six feet long. Wire a small stone to one end, slip the ring of the trap over the other end so it will slide down to the rock, which should be placed in deep water, the other end being fastened to the bank by a stake. When the muskrat is caught, he will make a plunge for deep water, sliding the ring to the rock. Have a small loop in the wire close to the rock so the ring will go into it. This prevents him from pulling back to the bank.

In the South and Southwest, furs become very poor early in the spring. March furs show signs

of shedding, and are as poor as April-caught fur in the North.

The mink is the first animal to show effects of spring. In February, the mink loses the dark, long, silky fur, and becomes faded and coarse.

Fur-bearing animals start to run in the early spring. Skunks show up very poorly as soon as warm weather starts and snow is gone.

As soon as the trapper sees he is getting poor fur, that is the time to stop. Do not continue to slay the animals, because it is only killing off the fur bearer that another winter may get in your own trap and make good money for you.

Many a trapper, who has kept on when he knew it was too late, felt very badly when he found a female in his trap, be it mink, otter or any other animal, and found she was carrying her young, and he had not only slain the mother but had also taken the lives of the little ones.

The raccoon in the North retains its heavy coat of fur until far into the spring, and in those states where the law permits can be hunted and trapped with profit until very warm, spring weather.

In the far North, fur remains good until far into the spring.

Furs should all be shipped before warm weather comes. Some trappers hold back their furs until May and June. All fur exporters buy raw furs at any time of year, but prefer to get them before the weather gets warm, as moths and flies get into them very quickly.

The trapper in the far South is up against the hardest part of the business. He has only a short month or two for trapping. Furs do not get prime in Florida, southern Alabama and southern Mississippi until the middle of December, and by February they are very poor again, due to warm weather.

Do not forget that in spring trapping, meat bait is virtually worthless without a good scent.

In trapping, should you get hold of an animal still alive, not injured by the trap, you may be able to dispose of the animal alive at a high price.

A great many people are starting farms for the raising of foxes, skunks and other animals. Indeed, in Canada, breeders of the black and silver gray foxes are receiving thousands of dollars for such live animals.

How Fur Dealers Try to Please

FUR dealers try to please their shippers in every way possible. Those who advertise in the magazines—and **COMFORT** is one of the mediums they seek, since it reaches so great a number of trappers—know that they must pay the highest price for skins, otherwise they will lose business. In fact I know of many instances where the check is really larger than it should be, simply to encourage beginners.

The beginner does not, as a rule, have his furs in the best possible condition. As a result, the highest prices cannot be paid. I might say—and I base my knowledge upon facts gleaned from years with buyers—that most of the complaints come from those who send in their goods and expect forever the best price quoted. In looking over a list, remember that there is a low and high value; the latter only for the best pelts from the section mentioned.

One does not take much risk in shipping to

reliable houses and only such are permitted to advertise in **COMFORT**. If he wishes, he can have his shipments held separate and in case the valuation does not meet with the owner's approval, all he needs to do is to request it sent back. On such lots as these the shipper must request the buyer to give him the valuation. Write a letter asking this special service as soon as the goods are shipped. Unless one does this, his furs cannot be sent back, for they are mixed with thousands of others and cannot be picked out.

Green furs, or those tainted, will not be held. The former will spoil, and the latter to be of value at all, must have attention. Do not, therefore, ask shipments to be valued before selling if they are not in good condition. Unreasonable requests cannot be granted.

There are a few concerns that will hold all shipments in good condition, and will submit the valuation. Most do not, however, unless re-



PULL THE HIDE DOWN OVER THE BODY UNTIL THE FRONT LEGS ARE REACHED. WORK THESE OUT.

valuation. Most do not, however, unless re-

Suggestions for Trappers

A small hand axe will be found handy for the pelt hunter. With it he can chop stakes, make excavations for sets, etc.

A bit of white paper or cloth will sometimes attract the muskrat. It is well to try this when all other baits fail.

Never take a dog over the trap line. It will have a tendency to scare the fur bearers.

Sets around the carcasses of cattle and sheep often bring good results, especially when after skunk and civet cat.

Short pieces of flexible wire will be found handy in staking sets for muskrat, coon and mink in deep water. If possible, have the fur bearers drown as soon as they are caught so no skins are lost.

Skunk grease is hard to sell. Go to your local druggist and see if he cannot find you a market for it.

The flesh of the raccoon and opossum may be sold in many places. If you live near a large city, a market may be had with restaurants, hotel.

Do not approach sets for mink closer than necessary to see if they are disturbed. However, baits ought to be changed every ten days at least so that they do not get stale.

Parcel Post shipments go best insured. If they are lost or damaged, the owner will not suffer a loss.

Do not use meat too close to houses. It will attract dogs and cats as well as fur bearers, etc., etc. Often muskrats can be disposed of also.

A flashlight for trappers will be found handy for the beginner in locating tracks and signs. Always carry one on the line.

Never shoot small animals alive in the traps with the exception of the skunk and civet. Others may best be killed with a club.

Always ship skins flesh side out—at least the small fur bearers mentioned in this booklet, with the exception of the weasel. Graders prefer them that way.

Be sure your name and address, with the number and kind of hides, are in each lot. Write your dealer any other instructions you deem necessary.

Most of the muskrats are taken in the fall for the reason that the fur bearers are most active then. Later when their pelts get better they do not run much.

Crows, bluejays and hawks are worthless as decoys. Do not use them.

Be sure all superfluous flesh and fat are scraped from the skin before it is stretched. Unless this is done, the fur is liable to taint, especially in warm weather.

Continued on Page 16.

How to Prepare Furs for Market

THE preparation of furs for market is almost as important as catching them. Even the most valuable skins may be ruined through ignorance or lack of attention to details.

Dealers generally prefer the pelts skinned as follows: Skunk, civet, opossum, mink and muskrat "eased"—that is, not cut down the belly—and raccoon "open." With the possible exception of the finer Northern and Northeastern mink, all hides ought to be skinned flesh side out and dried that way. Some buyers recommend the weasel dried and sent fur side out, so it will not be necessary to turn the pelt to ascertain if it is prime. When weasels are sent fur side out, along with other skins, it is best to wrap them separately so they will not be soiled by grease and dirt. While grease and dirt on the fur does not affect the value, it has been my experience that appearance in skins offered for sale is frequently paid for in real money.

Use a sharp knife for skinning. Take long strokes so that the edges of the skin are not ragged. In "eased" pelts, start at the hind legs and work toward the crotch, loosening the hide. Next, split open the tail as far as possible, and pull out the bone. After this, pull the hide down over the body until the front legs are reached. Work these out. Next slip the skin down to the ears, cut beneath and also around the eyes, then over the nose. The tails of the muskrat and opossum have no value, so it is not necessary to skin them.

In giving these instructions, remember I am treating only the smaller animals. The lynx, bear, etc., must, if used for mounting purposes, be perfect as to feet and claws.

With "eased" skins, employ steel stretchers or boards fashioned to fit. These should, preferably, be made of soft wood, the edges tapering and not sharp. If boards are employed, the hides may be held in place with tacks or small nails. Be sure to remove all fat and flesh. Unless this is done, the furs are liable to become "grease burned" or "taint." In this condition they are worth very little, often nothing.

Use no preparation of any kind on furs, unless of course at the beginning of the fur season, when they are liable to spoil. In this case, salt the skins. Salted pelts do not bring as much as those cured in a natural way, yet more than tainted and "grease burned" skins. One way to

avoid spoiled furs is to ship them as soon as they are cured. The one who does this generally has more to show for his labor than one who lets two or three hides spoil while waiting for an advance which may never come.

Hang your catch in a cool, shady place where there is plenty of air. Never dry them in the sun or over a fire.

Traps for the smaller animals ought to be attended to every morning and the skins removed as soon as possible.

When animals are frozen stiff, they ought to be thawed before the pelt is removed. It is best to place them in a pail of cold water or in a spring. When this is done, no damage can result. I have known of furs being ruined because they were singed over a blaze in thawing.

When shipping, it is best to pack securely in burlap and ship by express, especially if the lot weighs more than five or six pounds and the distance is greater than a hundred miles. In the inside of your shipment, place your name and address, together with the count and kind of furs. It is advisable to notify your dealer just what you send and give him your instructions by letter just as soon as the package leaves your hands.

Some agents will not accept skunk except when boxed. In this case, one must follow the instructions and prepare his package accordingly. When shipping by Parcel Post it is best to insure the package. It is permissible to place your name and address inside the parcel post package, together with the number of asking, but the regulations prohibit any letter of instructions. This, however, when placed in a sealed envelope carrying first-class postage, may be attached to the shipment.

It is absolutely necessary that you write your name and address plainly when sending in your furs. Every year large buyers have many shipments they cannot pay for, because they do not know who sent them. If you do not hear from your lot within a reasonable length of time, write the one to whom they were consigned, asking the reason. Generally returns are made same day packages are received.

If you desire your goods "held separate" so that you can know the buyer's offer before they are sold—request this by letter as soon as the shipment is made. If the bid is too low, in your estimation, you may ask the return of your lot. Remember, if goods are not ordered "held separate," it is impossible to have them sent back.



START AT THE HIND LEGS AND WORK TOWARD THE CROTCH, LOOSENING THE HIDE.

(Suggestions for Trappers. Cont.)

Warm, rainy nights are best for taking the mink. However, the animal travels in the coldest weather, and, unlike the skunk and civet, does not den up.

Go over your proposed trapping grounds early in the season. It will pay you in locating the signs and runways. Dens are easy to locate also.

In the spring, sets for skunk must be watched closely. If a male is captured and another discovers it, they are sure to fight. The caught animal is certain to get the worst of it. Guard hairs are cut out and the hide is not pleasant to handle due to the odor.

When once an animal is captured, do not pull up the set. Soon another undoubtedly will be captured.

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